

Controlling the spread of COVID-19: Health Secretary's statement to Parliament

I want to thank you Mr Speaker, for allowing me to make a statement at this time.

Mr Speaker, the coronavirus pandemic is the most serious public health emergency that our nation has faced for a generation.

Our goal is to protect life.

Our actions have meant that the spread of the virus has been slowed in the UK.

And I pay tribute to the officials at Public Health England and the NHS for their exemplary approach to contact tracing and their work so far.

However, the disease is now accelerating and 53 people have sadly now died.

Our hearts go out to their families.

Our policy is to fight this virus with everything we've got.

Last week, my RHF the Chancellor confirmed a £30 billion package of financial firepower, including a £5 billion contingency fund to ensure that the NHS and social care system have the resources they need.

We will give the NHS whatever it needs. We will do whatever it takes.

We will get through this by working through our action plan to contain, delay, research and mitigate the virus.

And that plan has 2 overriding aims.

To protect the NHS by building it up and flattening the curve. And to protect life by safeguarding those who are most vulnerable.

We will do the right thing at the right time, based on the best scientific advice.

Earlier I attended a COBR meeting chaired by the Prime Minister to decide on the next steps in our plan.

I can report to the House that we have agreed a very significant step in the actions we're taking, from within that plan, to control the spread of the disease.

These actions will change the ordinary lives of everyone in this country.

We appreciate that they are very significant and I understand that people will be concerned.

But we have come to the view that they are necessary to save lives and to stop this disease.

First, based on the updated scientific advice, we are today advising that if you or anyone in your home has a high temperature or a new and continuous cough, then you should stay at home for 14 days.

If at all possible, you should not go out even to buy food and essentials.

Instead you should ask others for assistance with your daily necessities.

The exception to this is for exercise. Even then, you should keep at a safe distance from others.

If it's not possible to receive deliveries at home, then you should do what you can to limit your social contact when you leave the house to get supplies.

Even if you or anyone in your household don't have symptoms, there is more that we have to ask of you.

Today we are advising people against all unnecessary social contact with others and all unnecessary travel.

We need people to start working from home if they possibly can.

We should steer clear of pubs, clubs, cinemas and restaurants.

We should only use the NHS when we really need to.

This advice is directed at everyone, but it's especially important for the over 70s, for pregnant women and for those with some health conditions.

It's especially true of London, which the evidence suggests is several weeks ahead of the rest of the country.

These measures will be disruptive, but they will save lives.

In a few days' time – by this coming weekend – we will need to go even further to ensure that those with the most serious health conditions are largely shielded from social contact for around 12 weeks.

We want to ensure that this period of maximum shielding coincides with the peak of maximum transmission.

And while the risks of transmission at mass gatherings such as sporting events are relatively low, from tomorrow we will be withdrawing our support for mass gatherings.

This will free up critical workers we need to deal with the emergency and ensure a consistent approach to social contact.

Second, we are increasing our testing capabilities yet further.

The UK has tested more people than almost any other major economy outside of China, South Korea and Italy.

We have already increased the number of tests to 5,000 a day and this is now on its way to 10,000 and then radically further.

Third, we are boosting the NHS.

Ventilation is mission critical to treating this disease and we have been buying up ventilation equipment since the start of the crisis.

But we need more.

And today the Prime Minister hosted a call with the nation's advanced manufacturers, asking them to join a national effort to produce the ventilators we need.

We've set up a dedicated team to do this, and we are hugely encouraged by the scale of the response so far.

Later today the NHS itself will set out the very significant steps it is taking to prepare.

Fourth, Mr Speaker, on Thursday we will introduce the Coronavirus Emergency Bill.

This Bill will give us the powers to keep essential services running at a time when large parts of the workforce may be off sick.

Some of these measures will be very significant and a departure from the way we do things in peacetime.

These are strictly temporary and proportionate to the threat we face, and I hope that many will not have to be used at all.

They will only be activated on the basis of scientific advice and will only be in place for as long as is clinically necessary.

Finally, of course we are ramping up our communications effort so that people know what steps they need to take to protect themselves, others and the NHS.

Mr Speaker, tackling coronavirus is a national effort, and everyone has a part to play.

The more people follow the public health advice, the less need to bring in draconian actions that I am keen to avoid.

And of course, do not forget the simple things we can all do.

Washing your hands. Following the public health advice if you have symptoms. Looking out for the most vulnerable in the community.

Mr Speaker, the measures I have just outlined are unprecedented in peacetime.

We will fight this virus with everything we've got.

We are in a war against an invisible killer and we have got to do everything we can to stop it.

And I commend this statement to the House.

Robert Jenrick reaffirms support for councils in their coronavirus response

- Local Government Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP has today addressed over 300 council leaders in England
- Jenrick reaffirmed government's commitment to giving councils the support they need to contribute to the national effort
- He also confirmed a series of practical measures which will give councils greater flexibility to respond to coronavirus

The government stands ready to do whatever is necessary to support councils in their response to coronavirus, the Local Government Secretary confirmed to council leaders today (16 March 2020).

Local Government Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP addressed over 300 council leaders and sector bodies in a call on the government's response to coronavirus.

He reaffirmed the government's commitment to supporting councils to focus their efforts on the priority area of social care, providing vital support for vulnerable people and supporting their local economies.

He also confirmed additional military personnel will now work with Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) on their coronavirus response plans, following the initial announcement of 38 planners supporting the forums in England.

Local Government Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

As part of the national effort to keep the public safe and deliver essential public services, this government stands with local councils at this difficult time.

My absolute priority is to ensure they are well placed to respond to coronavirus and protect vital services, including social care.

Everyone needs to play their part to help the most vulnerable in

society and support their local economy, and the government will do whatever is necessary to support these efforts.

During the call, he also reiterated the practical measures introduced by government which will give councils greater flexibility and allow them to further focus their resources on the response to coronavirus.

In addition to measures previously brought forward by the government, including the relaxation of restrictions on supermarket deliveries and the postponement of local, mayoral and Police and Crime Commissioner elections until May next year, the government has now confirmed:

- Routine Care Quality Commission inspections will be temporarily suspended for the duration of the COVID-19 outbreak
- Ofsted will look very favourably on any requests to defer inspections because of coronavirus
- Councils will be able to use their discretion on deadlines for Freedom of Information requests
- The deadline for local government financial audits will be extended to 30 September 2020
- It will consider bringing forward legislation to remove the requirement for annual council meetings to take place in person
- It will consider bringing forward legislation to allow council committee meetings to be held virtually for a temporary period

For the latest health advice visit: [nhs.uk/coronavirus](https://www.nhs.uk/coronavirus)

The government is working intensively with the local government sector to ensure the most vulnerable people in society are supported while protecting the local economy.

At Budget, the Chancellor set out a £12 billion package of temporary, timely and targeted measures to support public services, individuals and businesses through the economic disruption caused by COVID-19.

As part of the Budget, the government committed to providing Local Authorities with £500 million to support economically vulnerable individuals and households. We expect most of this funding to be used to provide more council tax relief, either through existing Local Council Tax Support schemes, or through complementary reliefs.

The government will also increase the Business Rates retail discount to 100% for one year and expand it to the leisure and hospitality sectors, and increase the planned rates discount for pubs to £5,000. Taken together with existing small business rate relief (which provides full relief for businesses using a single property with a rateable value of £12,000 or less), an estimated 900,000 properties, or 45% of all properties in England, will receive 100% business rates relief in 2020 to 2021:

- Businesses that received the retail discount in 2019 to 2020 will be rebilled by their local authority as soon as possible
- Those businesses eligible for the newly expanded retail discount and/or

the new pubs discount may need to apply to their local authority to receive the discount

- Any enquiries on eligibility for, or provision of, the reliefs should be directed to the relevant local authority
- Guidance for local authorities on the application of the expanded retail discount will be published by MHCLG by 20 March

The government will provide an additional £2.2 billion funding for local authorities to support small businesses that already pay little or no Business Rates because of Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR).

A new temporary Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, delivered by the British Business Bank, will launch in a matter of weeks to support businesses to access bank lending and overdrafts.

The request to the Ministry of Defence (MOD) is for additional non-uniform personnel to assist Local Resilience Forums to support local authority elements of COVID-19 response plans, including social care. This is in addition to the 38 already involved in helping Local Resilience Forums with local planning.

Up to 70 MOD planners and Liaison Officers have been activated to support public services, local authorities and emergency services in preparing their response to the coronavirus outbreak.

Permanent £5 billion boost to UKEF lending capacity

Through its direct lending scheme, UK Export Finance (UKEF), provides overseas buyers of UK goods and services with financing support in the form of long-term, fixed-rate lending.

£2 billion of direct lending has been allocated to support clean growth projects as global economies shift away from fossil fuels to renewable and low carbon solutions. This measure will help finance such projects overseas and ensure UK exporters are well placed to supply to this fast evolving area.

UKEF recently provided [£230 million of project finance guarantees for one of Asia's largest offshore wind farms in Taiwan](#) and a [£47 million facility for two solar plants in Spain](#), securing export opportunities for the UK renewable sector.

UKEF also unveiled half a million pounds of local support for businesses based in Scotland and the North of England. Export finance will be used to support clean growth exports as companies transition away from fossil fuels.

UKEF's Chief Executive Officer, Louis Taylor, said:

Enhancing direct lending and other world-leading support available from UK Export Finance will encourage overseas companies to source from the UK and help exporters across the country succeed abroad. This is a huge increase to our capacity to support UK exports.

UKEF has also been allocated £1 billion of direct lending capacity within its £8 billion overall facility for defence and security projects and improved its buyer credit guarantee scheme to make the product more competitive for fixed-rate financing.

The one-off £2 billion direct lending increase announced in the 2018 autumn budget has now been made permanently available to make UKEF's total permanent lending facility £8 billion.

[Filing charity annual returns during the coronavirus pandemic](#)

During the coronavirus pandemic the charity sector will face challenges of looking after its staff, volunteers and trustees who may fall ill, have to self-isolate, or have to look after loved ones. The sector also has a vital role to play in looking after its beneficiaries, many of whom will be amongst the most vulnerable during this public health emergency.

We want to assure charities that our approach to regulation during this period will be as flexible and supportive as possible. Charities' primary interest, and ours, must be looking after the public and the communities that we serve. Charities can feel confident that we will, where possible, act in a pragmatic way by taking account of the wider public interest during this unprecedented period.

Where you face real and urgent legal issues, you should take advice on these.

Charities can also call our contact centre.

As an immediate step, charities that are due to submit an Annual Return imminently, but feel unable to do so, can call us to request a filing extension.

We have been discussing the impact of the current situation with government and the sector and will continue to do so over the coming days. Any further measures we can take to help will be communicated in due course.

Please use GOV.UK as the main source of [information about the pandemic](#)

PM statement on coronavirus: 16 March 2020

Good afternoon everybody, thank you very much for coming. I wanted to bring everyone up to date with the national fight back against the new coronavirus and the decisions that we've just taken in COBR for the whole of the UK.

As we said last week, our objective is to delay and flatten the peak of the epidemic by bringing forward the right measures at the right time, so that we minimise suffering and save lives. And everything we do is based scrupulously on the best scientific advice.

Last week we asked everyone to stay at home if you had one of two key symptoms: a high temperature or a new and continuous cough.

Today, we need to go further, because according to SAGE [the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies] it looks as though we're now approaching the fast growth part of the upward curve.

And without drastic action, cases could double every 5 or 6 days.

So, first, we need to ask you to ensure that if you or anyone in your household has one of those two symptoms, then you should stay at home for fourteen days.

That means that if possible you should not go out even to buy food or essentials, other than for exercise, and in that case at a safe distance from others. If necessary, you should ask for help from others for your daily necessities. And if that is not possible, then you should do what you can to limit your social contact when you leave the house to get supplies.

And even if you don't have symptoms and if no one in your household has symptoms, there is more that we need you to do now.

So, second, now is the time for everyone to stop non-essential contact with others and to stop all unnecessary travel.

We need people to start working from home where they possibly can. And you should avoid pubs, clubs, theatres and other such social venues.

It goes without saying, we should all only use the NHS when we really need to. And please go online rather than ringing NHS 111.

Now, this advice about avoiding all unnecessary social contact, is particularly important for people over 70, for pregnant women and for those with some health conditions.

And if you ask, why are we doing this now, why now, why not earlier, or

later? Why bring in this very draconian measure?

The answer is that we are asking people to do something that is difficult and disruptive of their lives.

And the right moment, as we've always said, is to do it when it is most effective, when we think it can make the biggest difference to slowing the spread of the disease, reducing the number of victims, reducing the number of fatalities.

And as we take these steps we should be focusing on the most vulnerable.

So third, in a few days' time – by this coming weekend – it will be necessary to go further and to ensure that those with the most serious health conditions are largely shielded from social contact for around 12 weeks.

And again the reason for doing this in the next few days, rather than earlier or later, is that this is going to be very disruptive for people who have such conditions, and difficult for them, but, I believe, it's now necessary.

And we want to ensure that this period of shielding, this period of maximum protection coincides with the peak of the disease.

And it's now clear that the peak of the epidemic is coming faster in some parts of the country than in others.

And it looks as though London is now a few weeks ahead.

So, to relieve the pressure on the London health system and to slow the spread in London, it's important that Londoners now pay special attention to what we are saying about avoiding non-essential contact, and to take particularly seriously the advice about working from home, and avoiding confined spaces such as pubs and restaurants.

Lastly, it remains true as we have said in the last few weeks that risks of transmission of the disease at mass gatherings such as sporting events are relatively low.

But obviously, logically as we advise against unnecessary social contact of all kinds, it is right that we should extend this advice to mass gatherings as well.

And so we've also got to ensure that we have the critical workers we need, that might otherwise be deployed at those gatherings, to deal with this emergency.

So from tomorrow, we will no longer be supporting mass gatherings with emergency workers in the way that we normally do. So mass gatherings, we are now moving emphatically away from.

And I know that many people – including millions of fit and active people over 70 – may feel, listening to what I have just said, that there is something excessive about these measures.

But I have to say, I believe that they are overwhelmingly worth it to slow the spread of the disease, to reduce the peak, to save life, minimise suffering and to give our NHS the chance to cope.

Over the last few days, I have been comparing notes and talking to leaders around the world and I can tell you that the UK is now leading a growing global campaign amongst all our friends and allies, whether in the G7, the G20, the UN, the IMF – all those bodies in which we play a significant role.

We're leading a campaign to fight back against this disease.

To keep the economy growing, to make sure that humanity has access to the drugs and the treatments that we all need, and the UK is also at the front of the effort to back business, to back our economy, to make sure that we get through it.

I know that today we are asking a lot of everybody. It is far more now than just washing your hands – though clearly washing your hands remains important.

But I can tell you that across this country, people and businesses in my experience are responding with amazing energy and creativity to the challenge that we face, and I want to thank everybody for the part that you are playing and are going to play.